

Start Strong Council Meeting
Capital One, West Creek Campus
October 4, 2006 · 10AM-3PM

Dean Clifford called the meeting to order at 10:10. *Council members present at the meeting included:*

Ms. Deborah Battle, pre-kindergarten teacher, City of Norfolk Public Schools; Ms. Katherine Busser, Start Strong Chair & Vice President, Capital One; Ms. Elizabeth Cranwell, co-founder and teacher, New Vista Montessori School, Roanoke; Ms. Renee Dino, Early Childhood Education Supervisor, Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools; Mr. Gordon Gentry, CEO, Harbor Bank, Newport News; The Honorable Phillip Hamilton, member, House of Delegates; Ms. Karen Hodock, member, Bland County Board of Supervisors; Ms. Kimberly Hundley, kindergarten teacher, Williamsburg-James City County Public Schools; The Honorable Rob Krupicka, member, Alexandria City Council; Ms. Iris Leguizamo, center director, NOVA Child Development Center; The Honorable Kenneth Plum, member, House of Delegates; Ms. Jeanne Roper, vice president/past president, Valley Interfaith Child Care Center, Blacksburg; Ms. Judith Rosen, director, Fairfax County Office for Children; Mr. Walter Rugaber, retired president and publisher, The Roanoke Times, and former Interim President, Hollins University; Mr. Stephen Troxell, director, Shenandoah Valley Head Start Program.

Council members unable to attend included:

The Honorable John H. Chichester, member, Senate of Virginia; Mr. Robert Henry Dugger, III, managing director, Tudor Investment Corporation; Mr. Michael Harreld, president, PNC Bank, Greater Washington Region; Dr. Suzanne Clark Johnson, president, Voices for Virginia's Children; Dr. Stephen C. Jones, Superintendent, City of Norfolk Public Schools; Ms. Patricia Kluge, chairwoman, Kluge Estate Winery and Vineyard; The Honorable Mamie Locke, member, Senate of Virginia; Dr. Dwight Riddick, senior pastor, Gethsemane Baptist Church, Newport News; The Honorable Robert Tata, member, House of Delegates; Ms. Allison Weinstein, president and chief operating officer, Weinstein Properties, Richmond.

Dean spoke to the great work done by task forces. She emphasized that task forces and task forces members were sure to speak of incremental steps towards a quality pre-k program in the Commonwealth. Task forces still have work to flesh out over the next year and a half but preliminary recommendations are a great start to the Council's work. Task forces also shared a desire to have pilot models, giving citizens a program to see and review and understand the urgency and quality needed. Additionally, there was real concern across task forces about the need for data and pilot models will assist in the gathering of data. Moreover, we are very aware for the need of money in the budget to support community coalitions who begin working on this at the local level among funding for other needs. Staff will be working on this as recommendations flesh out.

Dean reviewed the agenda which includes a summary of task force progress by Secretary Morris and key recommendations by Katherine Busser, chair. Following this will be a

group discussion on potential pilot models that could be initiated. Lastly, members will participate in small group discussion prior to the conclusion of the meeting.

Secretary Morris then gave a review of the regional discussion sessions. Six discussion sessions were held in Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke, Abingdon, Harrisonburg, and Fairfax. Members were shown the video clip of the Governor discussing the Start Strong pre-k program and the objectives of the Start Strong Council. This video clip was shown at the beginning of each Start Strong discussion session. Audiences ranged from 50-70. Feedback from all sessions was overwhelmingly positive. Parent education and outreach was a recurring theme among participants. More importantly, participants were anxious to know all the details, and were happy to hear their opinions were being taken into account. Other recurring concerns included desire to know when the program will begin, if transportation would be provided, assessments of the program, how it will serve special needs children, the high turnover in childcare and professional development, if the program will be inclusive, the extent of SOL focus if any, and concern of private providers and the financial impact if they lose the business of four year olds. Furthermore, logistics of the program were questioned, such as whether it would be full-day or half-day, funding at state level (blending with VPI and Head Start) or those families who do not qualify for VPI or Head Start, the community vision (quantity vs. quality), and curriculum. Though all questions could not be answered, participants were reassured their opinions were wanted and that all concerns were being taken into account and addressed as we move forward to provide a quality pre-k system in the Commonwealth. This feedback was beyond helpful as we continue our work on such a complex project. Additional discussion sessions are planned for Southside and the Peninsula and potentially beyond this to attract a broader audience.

Task forces have had two all day meetings in September with approximately 15 members per task force. Recommendations from the task force that evolved included adopting a voluntary QRS, gathering outcome data on VPI, engaging all stakeholders, developing a list of required professional competencies, streamlining existing programs and funding, and establishing pilot sessions. Other recommendations evolved from task forces and are addressed in the handout.

Katherine Busser addressed in more detail the work of task forces. Katherine met with task force chairs via conference call to discuss in more detail recommendations for the preliminary report to the Governor. The recommendations cover a lot of components, for example recommendation A. addresses the Quality Rating System which is to be consistent for both public and private preschool programs, quality standards, staff qualifications, classroom interactions, curriculum, physical environment and other specifics which prove necessary. The second recommendation is to collect and use data and information to guide Start Strong decision making. This includes collecting retrospective data and analyze. This recommendation also considers the need of a survey of parents to gain an accurate picture of the current placement of young children in care settings and the need for addition preschool services. Third is to examine and strengthen existing programs and use these programs as a foundation for Start Strong. A subset of this would be review and identify all public funding streams and recommend ways to

improve utilization of existing funding. In addition, a single point of entry is potentially a possible and viable way to coordinate recruitment and registration policies and practices for existing public preschool programs to facilitate greater integration. Last, is to identify or create a governance structure at both the local and state levels. The Governor's Working Group may serve as the central coordinating body for early childhood programs at the state level and encourage top-level participation. This includes pilot programs, which is perhaps one of the most important recommendations the Council will be making. There will have to be multiple versions and models of pilots depending on the locality, the audience served. These pilots will not then be templates to set up such a program but rather a program will need to be established with guidelines in place but flexible for local needs.

Delegate Plum asked for more detail of the Governor's Working Group on Early Childhood Initiatives. Kathy Glazer is the Executive Director of the Group. Members of the group include many across the board such as Secretaries of Commerce and Trade, Health and Human Resources, Education, and many agency heads. Delegate Plum wanted to be reassured that this group could prove beneficial and should perhaps work with the Start Strong Council so neither group loses touch of the mission. Katherine Busser discussed the sustainability of the group and whether it would continue past the administration, would this prove the governing body of the program or is there a need for an Office of School Readiness. Dean Clifford reminded members that these recommendations may be steps that we take over the next year or two but we must address questions of sustainability. Many are nervous at all levels of standards for children and this concern is emerging at pre-k level. As a result we must be sure that this is put in place well allowing for an easy transition into kindergarten.

Judith Rosen spoke to the fact we are still at planning stages and not yet at implementation but that once implemented we may need to tweak the system but there is great need to take into consideration concerns prior to implementation and address these early. We must focus the infrastructure on areas that did not have the infrastructure before and that the system is appropriate and adequate for all locations. This is addressed in recommendation 4(G). The goal is to design a program that applies to children across the state.

Walter Rugaber addressed public engagement concern. From a public engagement standpoint it is important that each locality have their own Start Strong Council and take ownership of the program in their area. A regional coordinating body could prove beyond beneficial when "selling" the program and building on what currently exists.

Jeanne Roper asked for more detail of the QRS. Kathy spoke briefly to the matter, for it will be addressed next on the agenda. A QRS system is a voluntary means of assessment on a five star scale. Those programs scoring a five would be eligible for Start Strong classrooms. Other programs would be on a quality improvement path to work towards Start Strong eligibility. Parents may very well drive such a system, wanting to know the reasoning of a rating. **Stephen Troxell** noted that parents will want the best programs available and will be upset if slots are not available in the best quality programs. He

reminded members that we must have relations with private providers and schools before a strong relationship can be had with parents.

Kimberly Hundley agreed with the importance of the second recommendation of surveying parents to learn where children are located. Choice of survey method would be essential to capturing children and learning what is best needed. We must also make sure we are managing finances, not recreating a k-12 system, and ensuring communities, localities and parents have resources to educate their children.

Delegate Plum referenced the triennial census through the Department of Education which asks how many children in a household are between birth and school age. This census should be used to assist planning of Start Strong. **Delegate Hamilton** suggested that we reallocate what we have in resource and funding to provide high quality. He stressed the importance of data collection. Walter Rugaber even suggested we provide private providers incentives in data collection.

Delegate Plum stated 3(E) is a good idea but the coordination of this recommendation ought to occur before funding leaves Richmond. We must identify what the issues are beforehand to have this

Jeanne Roper asked how 4(F) would be implemented, a single point of entry. Dean Clifford shared an example of a locality that had a system in place. A single form was in place for all, situated in the same location on the same day. Following registration completion the student was placed where it best fit his or her needs. This program involved sharing data and much collaboration which took a great length of time. State assistance may be needed to foster this relationship. **Stephen Troxell** spoke to his locality and the concern that confusion could exist and the need for many pieces to come together for it to be successful.

Dean suggested that identification of costs and closing the gap of funding and services be added to the third recommendation. **Secretary Morris** stated that this conversation is helpful as we begin drafting our initial report and the importance of beginning to answer questions that have been addressed not only by members but those at Start Strong discussion sessions.

Following a ten minute break, **Katherine** asked if there was member consensus on the recommendations and if there was overall agreement they were a viable and great starting point.

Dean Clifford assured members that their comments from today were being taken into account and would be

Katherine asked by show of hands whether members would endorse the recommendations which would serve as a basis of the Council's report. Members agreed unanimously.

Judith Rosen suggested that as recommendations were edited and word smithed that they be shared with task forces. It was agreed task force members would be provided with recommendations and the Start Strong Council report, for both documents assist them in their continued work.

Kathy Glazer then presented on a Start Strong pilot scenario. Pilot suggestions include six communities, in which there are 10 laboratory classrooms in varied settings, all having achieved at least four stars under the Quality Rating System. This first cohort would serve approximately 1,080 students. Several things we can test and learn from the pilot is the development and function of local councils, the QRS system for selecting participating programs, presenting the initiative in diverse settings, braiding funding streams to provide options for parents and access for more children, examining requirements for professional development and monitoring, data collection and testing ways to expand services. Of these ten classrooms, new classes in each setting would consist of the following: 1 faith based provider setting, 2 private center settings, 1 Head Start in community setting, 1 VPI in a school setting, 2 blended Head Start/VPI classrooms in a school setting, 1 new ½ day Start Strong classroom and 2 new full day Start Strong classrooms. Braided fund examples could consist of full day coverage with VPI funds covering 9am-12 and Head Start funds covering 12-5pm. Or Start Strong funds would cover 9am-2pm and parent fees on a sliding scale covering 2pm-5pm. Within a classroom there are ways for funds to cover students. For example in one classroom VPI funds could cover 7 children, Head Start 7 children and Start Strong 4 children.

Kathy explained that a Quality Rating System is a means of assessing and rating the quality of an early childhood program – whether in a child care or preschool setting, public or private. This market based approach/system becomes a key strategy for where we are because the system will enable us to ensure consistent quality across settings. Components of the Alignments Project include the Benchmarks for Smart Beginnings, Early Learning Program Guidelines, Professional Competencies for Smart Beginnings, and a Career Lattice.

Various features of quality which are factored into the rating including the level of education of teachers and aides, physical environment of the classroom, materials and resources, management practices, and significantly the quality of interaction between the teacher and the child. In designing the QRS, we are developing program standards that address the quality features we identify as critical, identifying points awarded on a five-star scale with the help of Anne Mitchell, known nation-wide for her work with a QRS system. Many understand and grasp the concept of a five star scale and would be a great asset to parents. In addition is the use of validated rating instruments and independent rater, developing quality improvement plans which will also mark progress and be shared with parents. Moreover, technical assistance and incentives would be provided.

The benefits of a QRS include it being a strong consumer education tool for parents, and at-a-glance way to recognize the level of quality a program offers. A QRS is an effective marketing tool for programs to promote their services. It is a means of getting many programs in diverse settings on a quality improvement path, and establishes a structure

for financial incentives targeted to quality. Lastly, QRS is a market based approach that gets us out of regulatory discussion.

Judith Rosen asked of the time frame in which pilots would be established and the roll-out of the Alignment Project. The goal is to have the Alignment Project in its final draft this fall to allow for members of the Council to review and by next fall to have programs in place. Secretary Morris agreed this is the current timeline and plan.

Delegate Plum asked clarification and explanation of a Start Strong classroom. **Kathy** explained that currently we are speaking in terms of pilot classrooms who are engaged in a QRS, shown to be a four or five star quality, and willing to participate in this laboratory. Delegate Plum inquired about Start Strong curriculum. Kathy mentioned that Start Strong would have to address this as well but in blended classrooms would pull from Head Start and VPI curriculum and pull from these and the Alignment Project. We want this to be a program that is viewed as simply another at-risk program. Members asked whether we should call this then a Start Strong classroom or rather more general. This would have to be an issue task forces and members grapple with.

Members then broke for lunch. Following a thirty minute break, **Kathy** walked through the process of a QRS to explain the details in which members desired further explanation. Members received a copy of the Early Learning Guidelines. The module members received was on social and emotional development. This is not included in the Virginia Early Learning Blocks and is an enhancement to what is in place. Members received copies of the Professional Competencies Document. The Early Learning Guidelines go through the continuum of skills.

Delegate Plum asked how the Early Learning Guidelines relate to a Quality Rating System. Kathy explained that a program uses the Early Learning Guidelines, Program Standards and Competencies to provide the optimal learning environment. The Quality Rating System is established around these guidelines so it is clear what parents are looking for. The QRS uses a validated means of assessment that goes and assesses the program on the basis of these standards and awards a rating. If a private provider wants to be a five star program the program will have to show that they are using these standards and guidelines as a foundation.

Delegate Hamilton asked if these guidelines are much different than the curriculum in place for VPI and Head Start. **Mark Allen** agreed and mentioned the Board of Education's early childhood committee and its mission to create a curriculum rubric which localities will use as guidance. **Kathy** emphasized that a lot of this is already happening and that should increase our comfort level in developing this high quality comprehensive program.

Members reviewed a document on a Quality Report Card created by the United Way Success By 6. This based quality on learning environment, family partnerships, training and education, and accreditation.

Members divided into two groups at 1:20 to work until 2:15. One group is to discuss what success will look like in a pre-k program. Another point of discussion is from what you have heard what is particularly powerful and compelling and what is missing in the process recommended. At 2:20 groups reconvened and discussed their work.

Group 1 which discussed what is missing and what is empowering. The group concluded the following items were missing:

- An assessment of private providers that would be interested in participating
- Ability to access unconditional sources of revenue and funding
- How to entice communities to participate and whether they have a history of involvement – public engagement piece
- The need for a parent involvement strategy

The most compelling item was the urgency and need of high quality care and QRS

Group 2 spoke on the criteria of a successful pilot. The group concluded the following items would prove beneficial and successful:

- A parental involvement plan to ensure engagement
- A program that takes a multi-jurisdictional/regional approach rather than jurisdictional boundaries such as a k-12 system
- Teacher feedback on preschool experience to allow improvements and tracking
- Assessment of child over time to view overarching benefits of program
- Geographic diversity among pilots to capture all types of learning environments
- Mobilizing corporate funding to ensure programs are of high standards and beneficial to the community
- Program standard review to ensure staff and programs are of highest quality – through continued monitoring of a QRS
- Transition program to allow pre-k students an easy shift to kindergarten

Katherine recapped the meeting and recommendations. She felt that members agreed pilots, in varied settings, would be a beneficial start to a Start Strong program and asked members by show of hands if they were in agreement. Prior to voting, Stephen Troxell mentioned we should have a guideline for what is expected and what demonstrates success to provide pilot sites. Members were in agreement such a document and goals would be necessary. Judith Rosen stressed the need that a Quality Rating System be well in place for pilot sites. Members unanimously agreed pilot sites are to be put in place.

Dean Clifford reminded members a final report will be sent to them for their review prior to submission to the Governor. Budget recommendations, currently being drafted by staff, with council member input from meetings will be sent to all members as well. Task forces will reconvene on November 15 to flesh out and carry forward recommendations. The next meeting of the Start Strong Council will be held in December; perhaps a half day meeting near the beginning of the month. The December meeting will continue the conversation and designing goals for pilots. At this time the Start Strong report will be public and Council members will have feedback to address. Members agreed the next meeting would be held December 6. At the next meeting members will discuss the idea of

having Start Strong Council meetings across the state similar to the format of Start Strong discussion sessions. The Council adjourned at 2:45 to reconvene December 6.